

The Paten

One morning I had climbed a high hill and was turning around to go back. Below me, in the early light, ringed around with the silent hills, lay the lake, crystal clear. Great green trees bordered it with their nobly-sweeping boughs. The sky was high and spacious. The whole scene was so fresh, so clear, that a feeling of joy took possession of me. It was as if invisible noiseless fountains were gushing up into the bright, far, distance.

Then I came to understand how a man, whose heart is overflowing, may stand with uplifted face, and hands outspread like the shallow dish of the paten, and offer up to the Infinite Goodness, to the Father of lights, to God, who is love, the world around him and within him, the silent world brimming over with life and light, and how it would seem to him that that world, lifted up on the paten of his open hands, would be clean and holy.

Thus did Christ once stand on the spiritual mount and offer up to his Father the holocaust of his love and his life's breath. On a lower eminence of that same mountain, on the foothill of Mount Moriah, Abraham performed his sacrifice. And in the same spot before this the King and Priest Melchizedek had made expiation. In the self-same place, in the first age of the world, Abel's simple offering rose straight up to heaven.

That spiritual mountain still rises, and the hand of God is still stretched out above, and the gift mounts up every time a priest--not in his own person, since he is merely the instrument, of no value in itself,--stands at the altar and raises in his outspread hands the paten with the white bread on it. "Receive, O Holy Father, almighty, everlasting God, this spotless victim, which I, thine unworthy servant, offer to thee, O God, living and true, for all my countless sins and negligences, and for all those here present...that it may avail for my and their salvation into life everlasting."

